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ABSTRACT

One preschool-age child's literacy-oriented, self-initiated games and play are described in this report. Some of the games used decontextualized print, some focused on contextualized written language, some were number games, and some involved letters and words. Commercially produced games were used in addition to games constructed at home; these focused on various literacy skills (reading, writing, counting, listening, and speaking). Throughout the report, the child is portrayed as a creative and active partner in games of communication, manipulation, and invention. The point is made that even though the games were child-centered and child-initiated, they did not "just happen." The gaming took place in a language-oriented home environment where literacy was sought after, worked on, and taken for granted; in other words, it was an integral facet of socialization. The literacy events reviewed in this report are seen as one facet of an all-encompassing way of life and childrearing. It is concluded that the material presented suggests a naturalistic and holistic approach to literacy in the home, one which respects the individual learner's interests and style, as well as the cultural milieu and its effects on learning. (RH)

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LITERACY SOCIALIZATION: A PARENT DIARY OF A PRESCHOOLER

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This report is a new reflection on data collected for a larger diary study of my son, David, from the ages 2:6 to 4:6. The focus of the original study is on the emergence of literacy during the preschool years (Hoffman, 1982). For it, I collected data in a handwritten diary on a day-and-night basis, on audio tapes and with collected artifacts.

For the purpose of this report, I will discuss David's early socialization for a literate orientation by examining his initiated and other directed literacy games and his play with commercially available literacy toys and literacy related items. These cild-centered games, their initiation and encouragement, helped to prepare David for later schooling. David, in his attention getting behavior and curiosity, developed several learning games for himself and a willing partner.

These child initiated and directed games cut across several facets of literacy. While some of the games used decontextualized print others focused on contextualized written language; some were number games and others letters and words; commercially produced games were used for some and home constructed for others; some games focused on reading, some writing, some counting, some listening, and some speaking. In these interactions we see David as a creative and active partner in his games of communication, manipulation and invention.

I will discuss David's play with literacy games and motifs as it relates to his early enculturation into his middle class home and values. Intrinsic in these values is a strong literate environment and exposure -- for the present and the future. Literacy is fostered in the preschooler in order to prepare the child for a life as a literate person in a literate environment. The child is socialized for school from the crib on as he is read to daily, played with, questioned, and answered. Scollon and Scollon (1979) refer to "unconscious parental instruction in literacy" (p. 50). My own method was perhaps most exemplified by my attitudinal feedback and encouragement which became a type of instructional motif. David initiated his own interests, books, games and the like, and I, as parent-researcher, facilitated his progress.

The literate home environment and all of its ramifications is not "given" in all homes. Research evidence reveals that other social groups and cultures do not subscribe to the same early literacy enculturation (Miller, Nemoianu, & DeJong, 1981; Heath, 1980). As Heath states, "The general view has been that whatever it is that mainstream school-oriented homes have, these other homes don't have it; thus these children are not from the literate tradition and are not likely to succeed in school" (p.1)

Several investigators report that typically middle class children are successful in their later schooling (Heath, 1979; McKenzie, 1977; Michaels and Gumperz, 1979; Ninio & Bruner, 1978; Scollon & Scollon, 1979). Yet, there remains a need for a clear

profile of the process of development of literacy in these middle class homes (Heath, 1980).

As David was socialized into the family, he was likewise socialized as a literate person. That is, David's socialization intertwined with his literacy development. This involved David playing tricks and games with his newly acquired literacy skills. These games were not imposed upon David in a teaching-learning fashion, but importantly these contrived and sometimes tedious games emanated from David and terminated as he lost interest. If these games had been other-initiated they might have been more structured, possibly dull and never as spontaneous. By asking willing partners to play with him, David was always able to find a friend to be with, and took pride in his ability to keep a game going with someone so much older than himself.

The object of one of David's spontaneous games, "Sign Reading," was for "us" (David and myself) to read as many signs as we could while I was driving the car. At first, David pointed to the signs and asked me to read to him. After playing the game for a while, David began to interject his own reading of the signs that he could "catch" as we whizzed by them. His favorites were the gas station signs like Exxon, Arco, Gulf, and Shell. Later he learned to read the street signs such as Stop, Speed Limit 35, No Parking Any Time, School Zone, End School Zone, and so on. Sometimes he wanted me to tally how many times we read each of the signs. The following examples are representative of the hundreds of such examples of "Sign Reading."

Example 1

On the way to nursery school, David said, "Let's talk about signs! What does that sign say?"
I answered, "Right turn signal."
David proceeded with, "And what does that yellow and red shell say?"
I answered him, "It says, 'Shell' -- that's a gasoline station."
He asked, "Does it have seashells in it?"
I answered, "No." We proceeded to read signs. I read the majority as he requested. However, David read, "Speed Limit 35", Bike Route", "No Parking Any Time". When we came to "No Parking This Side of Street," he thought it was, "No Parking Any Time."

These were the signs that I was able to read as he requested while I was driving. They were not the only ones on the route.

SPEED LIMIT 40

SPEED LIMIT 35 (12 X)

NO PARKING ANY TIME (20 X)

SCHOOL SPEED LIMIT (2X)

NO PARKING THIS SIDE OF STREET (7X)

BIKE ROUTE (2X)

NO TURN ON RED (3X)

WATCH CHILDREN

SIGNAL AHEAD (3X)

NO LITTERING (1X)

DRIVEWAY (1X)

(David; Age 3:6)

In this example we can see where patience was needed in order to communicate with a young child while I was driving the car. This repetitive reading of individual signs (some 12 and 20 time a morning) was the manner in which David learned to read these same

signs over time. Through a game, even car riding contributed to David's literacy development.

The next example of "The Sign Reading Game" is taken from a larger audio tape of our morning car rides to nursery school. In this example we can see where I am requested to read most of signs, but that David does fill in the ones that he recognizes.

Example 2

David	Sandy
	This one says, "Watch childred", and another one says, "No Turn on Red." Speed Limit 55 and Limit when Flashing.
It's not flashing.	
	It's not flashing. Right. So, we don't have to go 15 miles. _____ No Parking This Side of Street.
What does that one say?	
	No Parking This Side of Street. No. Speed Limit 35. End School Zone. No Parking This Side of Street. No Parking This Side. Here's one for you.
Speed Limit 35.	
	How about this little one down here?
No Parking Anytime.	
	Right! No Turn on Red. Watch Children. _____ Yellow?
Speed Limit 35.	
	Okay, the next one? (Pause) School Speed Limit When Flashing (slowly)
But, it's not flashing.	
	Right. End of School Zone. Here's another one.
Speed Limit 35. (read as Spee Limut)	
	How about this one?
Speed Zone Ahead. (read as Spee Zo Ahead)	

Example 2 cont'd

David	Sandy
	Good. (6 sec. pause) How about this one?
No Turn on Red.	
	Did you see the first word? It says, "No." N-O is no. Do you see the "no" there?
Yah.	
	We used to write that with your magnetic letters.
N-O. No.	
	N-O right.
_____on there. A O-N	
	The other way. N-O.
Where's the "N" on there?	
	It was first.
No, on your car.	

(David; Age 3:7)
Tape 6(2)

In this excerpt, one can see out turn-taking and literacy discussion while I was driving the car. In it, I read the signs for David and pointed out the ones for him to read. We had "played" "Reading Signs" so often that I knew which signs were in his repertoire. While this game was fun for David, it represented his hours of practice in identifying contextualized print (pring in its environment). Several investigators have studied young children's reading of contextualized print (Harste, Burke, & Woodward, 1979; Harste & Carey, 1979; Ylisto, 1967). In all of the studies, the children were reading signs in the environment before they read the decontextualized words.

Another child-initiated game was David's spontaneous "Word Rhyming" game. In this game David either drew in other players or would have fun rhyming words as he saw objects in the environment. These spontaneous rhyming games were prevelant for an eight month period of time (from 3:3 to 3:11). In example 3 we can see where objects in the environment were the stimulus behind his rhymes.

Example 3

David and I were driving in the car.
David wanted me to buy him a toy to play with.
He told me so. Then he said,

"Toy rhymes with boy".

We passed a fence on the road and he said,

"Fence rhymes with mence."

The light turned red and he said,

"Red light rhymes with bed light."

We passed a big truck and he said,

"Truck rhymes with muck,"

(David: Age 3:4)

In this example we can see where David overgeneralized in order to rhyme words. He was free to form nonsense words. David enjoyed rhyming words during these months and therefore he often contrived ways to play with words that rhyme. Garvey (1977) considers rhyming as the most obvious type of word play. She also brings out that "the manipulation of sense and nonsense is one of the components of successful rhymes and stories written

by adults for children, but children too can create nonsense." (p.39) Several other investigators have observed this type of speech play (Chukovsky, 1963; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Sherzer, 1979; Geller, 1983; Iwamura, 1980). However, only Geller links rhyming with literacy socialization.

In example 4 David directs other members of the family in a "Rhyming Word" game

Example 4

All of the family members were at the table eating lunch (Mother-Sandy; Father-Jerry; Sister-Alisa; Sister-Sharon; and David).

David: "Let's think of all the people in our family and their rhyming words. No, let's think of the people in the whole world."

David: "Lisa, what rhymes with Lisa" I know pizza."

David: "Sandy, what rhymes with Sandy?"
Sandy: "Candy"
David: "Jerry, what rhymes with Jerry?"
David: "Berry"
Sandy: "Merry"

David: "Sharon, what rhymes with Sharon?"
Sandy: "Baron"
David: "Caren"

David: "David, why rhymes with David?"
David: "Mavid"

(David; Age 3:11)

In this game David gave the directions, set out the limits, and was the controlling player. He made sure to include all of the members of the family, saving himself for last. This initial consonant substitution is a favorite of young children. Geller (1983) feels its the most popular rhyme form in children's traditional verse.

In the following example, David demonstrates how he played with a literacy game in order to pass the time. We were stuck in traffic and David had a captive audience.

Example 5

While we drove to nursery school, David asked to play "Rhyming Words".

David: "Mom, what rhymes with tree?"
Sandy: "Bee"
David: "Pee" and he laughed.
David" "Me rhymes with tree and bee rhymes with tree too."
David: "Let's do another one".
(We were now stuck in traffic.)
David: "What shymes with stuck?"
Sandy: "Truck"
David: "Luck rhymes too."
"Hey, Mom, know what rhymes with chair"
"Bear."

(David; Age 3:3)

In this example we can see where David was in control of the conversation which involved turn-taking with his willing play partner. This game was initiated and terminated by David.

In the following short example we can see where David tried to use rhyming words to get out of a bad situation.

Example 6

David was angry with me and said,

"I hate you."

Alisa said, "Oooooooooooooooo", in a teasing fashion.

David said, "I said I bait you -- like bait a fish. That's not bad!"

(David; Age 3:8)

Here we can see where David was beginning to manipulate language by using his rhyming words. Kirschenblatt-Gimblett and Sherzer, in their introduction to Speech Play (1976), describe speech play as,". . . any local manipulation of elements and relations of language, creative of a specialized genre, code-variety, and/or style. A key word, of course is 'manipulation'." (1976, p. 1)

A third type of child-initiated and child centered game which David loved is his "Protagonist-Antagonist" game. Many of the characters for this game come from the literature which I read to him. All of these games require a willing partner who was familiar with David's repertoire and background.

Example 7

David was in the car with his father and the discussion was about protagonists and antagonists.

David: "Batman"

Jerry: "The Joker would overcome Batman."

David: "Judah Maccabee would overcome the Joker."

Jerry: "The Phillistines would overcome Judah Maccabee?"

David: "Samson would overcome the Phillistines.

Jerry: "Delilah would overcome Samson."

David: "The Friendly Giant and the Crab would overcome Delilah."

Jerry: "Who?"

David: "Orion would overcome Delilah."

Jerry: "Cyclops would overcome Orion."

David: "The Maccabees would overcome Cyclops."

Jerry: (Gave up)

(David; Age 3:8)

In this game David plays with the old theme of "goodies and baddies" in a competitive manner. In it he takes turns with his father and tries to think of the stronger or winning character. In order to do this, he must have complete comprehension of the characters and their stories. This kind of implied conceptualization is often asked for in later school years under the guise of "reading comprehension".

In the following example David and I play the same game together. This time he refers to more characters from the literature that has been read to him.

Example 8

We were in the car driving to nursery school.

David: "I'm King Tut and I can overcome Pharoah."

Sandy: "Moses can overcome King Tut."

David: "The Magicians can overcome Moses."

Sandy: "Zeus will overcome the Magicians."

David: "Hercules would overcome Zeus."

Sandy: "Paul Bunyan would overcome Hercules."

David: "David would overcome Paul Bunyan."

(David; Age 3:10)

In example 8 we can see where David plays this game until either or both of the partners runs out of characters. At that time the game is terminated and David goes on with something else. The object of the game is to think of the winning character from any time period in either fiction or nonfiction. No answers

were considered incorrect.

A fourth type of literacy game was played by David with a partner. In this game a conventional deck of cards was used to play a card game called "Casino". David still enjoys playing this once-popular card game. In it, the players try to gather in the most cards and spades by adding. Simple addition is used to build cards, i.e., you could take in a 3 and a 4 with a 7. Once David learned to play this game (age 3:8), he tried to cajole a willing partner to join him on a daily basis. This card game made use of all of the combinations of number up to 10. By playing the game often, David was able to practice these literacy skills which are often referred to as "number facts" in first grade.

David played with commercially available magnetic plastic letters which he placed on the dishwasher in the kitchen. He often referred to this play as a game. For this game, David made use of the contextualized print which he read in his "Sign Reading" game. He asked for the spelling of the words, decontextualized them, and placed them up on the dishwasher. In addition to these words, David learned to "write" his name, those of the other members of the family, and some favorite words. Later he learned to form short messages with the magnetic letters. Although David's own printing was not yet fully developed, he was able to play with invented spellings, proper spellings and with phrases. As time went on, he was able to express himself with short sentences. All of this play was at David's discretion and usually

while I was cooking dinner. In this way he was able to play and still be near me, his mother.

The following few examples are representative of the hundreds of such events.

Example 9

> A First! David uses his magnetic letters to write a word. The alphabet magnetic letters are on the dishwasher. David picked out the proper letter and wrote DAVID in upper case letters. This is the first time that he's written a word with the letters.
>
> (David; Age 3:7)

In this early example of David's maniuplation of print, we can see the beginning of his freedom to express himself with print. This was months before he was able to execute his own name with paper and pencil.

In the next example (10), David demonstrates his enjoyment in physically manipulating his letters and fixing his words.

Example 10

> I bought David a duplicate box of magnetic plastic letters. David put all of his new letters up on the dishwasher and then we put the names of the gas stations up together.
>
> EXXON
> SUNOCO
> GULF
> SHELL
> TEXACO
>
> David still wanted to leave up his "old" words, COOK, FOOD, and SUPER ADAM (his nickname).
>
> (David; Age 3:9)

In this example David moved from contextualized print (the gas station signs within their logos) to decontextualized print (the words outside of their signs). From this point on, he "played with" (manipulated) the words daily to the point where he could then put them up by himself if they fell or were accidentally moved around. David's movement from contextualized print in the environment to decontextualized print is reminiscent of Ylisto's study (1967) where several children made a similar transition under direction.

In example 11 David begins to invent spellings and to segment words.

Example 11

While I was on the phone in the kitchen this morning, David found an "X" on the dishwasher. He said,

> "I'm going to write 'Exit'. This is 'X', now where is 'it'?"

I pointed to the "it" letters and showed him where they go. Then I gave him the "E" to precede the "X" and he said,

> "I don't need that, the X says X and that's enough."

(David; Age 3:7)

One can see how hard David "worked on" his play with literacy. He spent hours adjusting, straightening, fixing, moving and manipulating his letters. In time he could "put up" more than three dozen words. (For a list of these words see Appendix).

In example 12 we can see where David learned to use the magnetic letters to form a message.

Example 12

David was playing with his magnetic letters.
He asked me how to spell, "No girls allowed".

I told him the spelling as he picked out the letters and put them up on the dishwasher.

He left up "I love you Mommy".

(David; Age 4:6)

In example 12 David begins to compose messages with print before he is facile enough to do the same easily with a pencil.

Magnetic letters were not David's only medium for messages. He also "played" with the typewriter and sent messages through the mail. In the following example, David typed a letter to his grandmother. He had asked her to stop smoking and then sent her the same message by mail.

Example 13

Dear Bubby,

Please stop smoking. I love you.

Love David

(David; 4:3)

David asked for the spelling of several of the words and found the letters on his own. He felt that the typed letter was more official than his oral request.

Aside from David's "Sign Reading" game, "Rhyming Word", game, "Antagonist-Protagonist" game, "Casino", "Magnetic letters", and "Typing", David spent many hours playing with commercially produced items which claim to foster literacy. These included Sesame Street Alphabet Cards, Sesame Street Alphabet Puzzles, Candyland, Picture Dominoes, Animal Rummy, and others. Through this gaming, David was able to practice and "work on" different aspects of literacy. He developed his own sight vocabulary, played with rhyming words, learned to identify letters and sounds, worked on number facts and manipulated print. Even though the games were child-centered and child-initiated, they didn't just happen. The gaming took place in a language oriented home environment where literacy is sought after, worked on and taken for granted; it is an integral, intertwined facet of socialization. That is, all of these literacy games and events were set within an environment whereby book reading and storytelling were daily ritual; David discussed, role played, questioned and referred to literature throughout his daily narrative. In essence, then, the literacy events reviewed and discussed in this report were merely one small facet of an all encompassing way of life and child rearing.

This study presents data to suggest an approach to literacy in the home and school that is more naturalistic and holistic, one which respects the individual learner, his interests and style as well as the cultural milieu and its effects on learning.

APPENDIX

Some of the words which became a part of his repertoire were:

EXXON
SUNOCO
GULF
SHELL
TEXACO
ARCO
COOK
FOOD
SUPER ADAM
DAVID
SANDY
JERRY
ALISA
SHARON
MOMMY
DAD
I LOVE YOU
I

EXIT
STOP
NO
GO
UP
DOWN
ON
SEE
LOOK
BOOK
BUT
CUT
IS
FIRE
COOKS
MEAT
NO GIRLS ALLOWED
ME
YES

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